

MAKING DIGITAL SKILLS INITIATIVES INCLUSIVE OF YOUNG PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

POLICY BRIEF OF THE GLOBAL INITIATIVE ON DECENT JOBS FOR YOUTH



Decent Jobs for Youth – the global initiative for action

Objective

Decent Jobs for Youth is the global initiative to scale up action and impact on youth employment under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Launched in 2016 with the endorsement of the executive heads of the United Nations, Decent Jobs for Youth is a unique platform for partners to address fragmentation and catalyse effective, innovative and evidence-based action at country and regional levels.

Partners

Decent Jobs for Youth brings together the resources and expertise of multiple partners to create linkages that maximize the effectiveness of youth employment investments. The initiative recognizes the important roles of governments, social partners, the UN System, youth and civil society, the private sector, regional institutions, parliamentarians, foundations, academia and the media in promoting decent jobs for youth. The partners of Decent Jobs for Youth subscribe to 15 guiding principles, which steer their actions and investments on youth employment.

Strategy



Building a strategic alliance to advocate, ensure policy convergence, stimulate innovative thinking and mobilize resources



Scaling up evidence-based action and impact across eight thematic priorities in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development



Sharing and applying knowledge by capturing, analysing and sharing best practices, highlighting innovative approaches and facilitating learning



Mobilizing resources by securing high-level commitments from national, regional and international actors

Priorities for action

Eight thematic priorities to make a difference in the lives of young women and men – and in our world. Thematic plans identify areas for enhanced action and impact on decent jobs.



Green jobs for youth



Digital skills for youth



Quality apprenticeships



Youth in fragile situations



Youth transitioning to the formal economy



Youth in the rural economy



Youth entrepreneurship and self-employment



Young workers in hazardous occupations

Making digital skills initiatives inclusive of young persons with disabilities

- There is a need to focus on youth with disabilities to prepare young people for the future of work in the digital economy, accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis.
- Estimates suggest that there are between 180 and 220 million young people with disabilities around the world and nearly 80% of them live in developing countries.
- Not only do inclusive digital skills initiatives support the fundamental rights of young persons with disabilities for inclusive education and access to decent work, but these initiatives also contribute to addressing the shortage of digitally skilled workers in labour markets around the world.
- By becoming more inclusive, mainstreaming digital skills initiatives can enhance the employability of young persons with disabilities and, therefore, increase their chances of finding decent work. Lower levels of education lead to an education and skills gap among young adults compared to other segments of the population and leave them without the skills required by employers for many jobs.
- Young people with disabilities are more likely to benefit from an inclusive digital skills initiative when action is coordinated across all levels - governments, international organizations, policy-making bodies, and digital skills training providers, private sector employers and support organisations.

1. Introduction

1.1. Young persons with disabilities and work

Young persons with disabilities continue to face multiple forms of discrimination in the world of work, including discrimination based on their disability and age. Other intersecting identities, including gender, sexual orientation, race, and ethnicity may exacerbate the discrimination experienced when trying to access and stay in the labour market. The COVID-19 crisis is further aggravating pre-existing inequalities in the world of work, including for young people with disabilities (ILO, 2020a).

Estimates suggest that there are between 180 and 220 million young people with disabilities around the world and nearly 80% of them live in developing countries (UNDESA, 2011). In the world of work, persons with disabilities face enormous attitudinal, physical, and informational barriers to equal employment opportunities. In addition, a lack of demanded skills among persons with disabilities limits their access to in-demand high-paying jobs and contributes to significantly lower employment levels for young persons with disabilities, as compared to their peers without disabilities. Across



eight geographical regions, the employment-to-population ratio (EPR) for persons with disabilities aged 15 years and older was 36% on average, whereas the EPR for persons without disabilities was 60%. Lack of accessible workplaces and reasonable accommodation poses further obstacles to the employment of persons with disabilities (UNDESA, 2018). When employed, people with disabilities commonly earn less than their counterparts without disabilities (WHO & WB, 2011). Young women with disabilities face higher access barriers as they face disability, youth, and gender-based societal prejudices (ILO, 2017c). Available statistics show that they tend to experience lower employment rates than women without disabilities and men with disabilities (UNDESA, 2018).

Younger workers, on the other hand, tend to experience worse labour market outcomes than older workers. Due to the COVID-19 crisis, employment outcomes for youth have worsened, with one out of six young persons out of work in the first half of 2020 (ILO, 2020b). The entry into stable employment has become a lengthier and more complex process. The trend towards non-standard forms of employment and the precarity (ILO, 2016a) that tends to accompany these processes make it harder for young people to access inclusive, full, and productive employment. Lack of access to adequate skills and qualifications, including digital skills, is one of the key issues related to unemployment and poverty among young persons with disabilities (UNICEF, 2013). This phenomenon is a ubiquitous experience for young persons with disabilities and tends to start at a young age. Persons with disabilities are frequently excluded from mainstream education. Mainstream education and training systems around the world are often not accessible for young persons with disabilities, including a lack of disability awareness among educators and inaccessible training material. Segregated vocational rehabilitation and training centres exclusively catering to persons with disabilities often provide a limited set of skills and are frequently not aligned with labour market demands (ILO, 2017a). These circumstances make it very difficult for young persons with disabilities to acquire strong foundational skills required by the high-performance labour markets and societies of the 21st century.

Digital skills

The digital economy requires a wide range of digital skills. These are skills that lead to specific outputs or complementary skills that are needed to perform jobs in the digital economy. The Global Initiative on Decent Jobs for Youth classifies these skills as follows:

- **Basic digital skills:** these are generic Information and Communication Technology (ICT) skills required for nearly all jobs. They relate to the effective use of technology, which is necessary in most professions. They include using productivity software, web research, online communication, use of professional online platforms and digital financial services.
- **Mid-level digital skills:** these include digital graphic design and marketing, desktop publishing and social media management, as well as entry level IT professional skills like installing and managing applications and simple network management, for both jobs and entrepreneurship opportunities.
- **Advanced digital skills:** skills necessary to create, manage, test and analyse ICTs. They relate to technology development, including coding, software and app development, network management, machine learning, big data analysis, Internet of Things (IoT), cybersecurity and block chain technology.
- **Digital entrepreneurship:** digital skills required by entrepreneurs, including online market research, strategic planning, and business analysis, using financing and crowd funding platforms, online marketing, online networking and establishing mentoring relationships.
- **Soft skills:** complementary to technical skills, these are skills necessary for all professionals to ensure collaborative and effective work in the digital economy. They include leadership, creativity, communication, teamwork, growth mind-set, and client focus, among others.

1.2. Skills for the digital future of work

The onset of the digital economy has ushered in a new era to the world of work. Its rapid growth, along with its collaborative, sharing, and on-demand nature, has transformed labour markets around the world and has been accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. The digital economy is rapidly transforming the employment landscape across industries, including financial services, health, entertainment, transportation and, of course, information and communication technologies (ICTs) (ITU, 2014). Innovative and competitive labour markets of the future, including in low- and middle-income countries (ILO, 2021a), require workers who possess a very specific set of competencies: digital skills— or “the skills and competences needed to make use of digital technology and benefit from its growing power and functionality” (Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development, 2017). To attain meaningful careers and high paying jobs, an increasing level of specialization of digital skills is required by the labour market, compared to the earlier stages of the ICT industry. With digitisation at the forefront of the future of work, establishing an effective lifelong learning ecosystem (ILO, 2021b; ILO, 2021c) is a joint responsibility, of governments, employers and workers, as well as educational institutions, to ensure everyone’s access to the skills training they need for the workplaces of the future (ILO, 2019).



Employment trends show that there will be tens of millions of jobs for people with advanced digital skills in the coming years, with some economies predicting a talent gap for workers with advanced digital skills and other ranking ICT specialists among their fastest-growing roles (ILO, 2017b). In addition, digital skills are linked to higher earning potential. On average, workers in OECD countries with middling to more advanced ICT skills earn 27% more than workers with no or only basic ICT skills (ILO, 2017b).

1.3. International frameworks for disability-inclusive decent work

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development places full and productive employment and decent work for youth at the centre of the new development vision. Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4 seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable education and vocational training for all. SDG 8 aims for inclusive, full, and productive employment, as well as decent work for all. SDG target 4.5 has a specific reference to persons with disabilities and SDG target 8.5 explicitly refers to both youth and persons with disabilities in terms of decent work and equal pay for work of equal value.

Similarly, Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) guarantees the right to inclusive education. Article 27 recognizes the right of persons with disabilities to work in open, inclusive and accessible environments.

By becoming more inclusive, mainstream digital skills initiatives can enhance the employability of young persons with disabilities and, therefore, increase their chances of finding and staying in decent work. In this context, inclusive digital skills initiatives have the potential not only to contribute to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda, but also to the fulfilment of the fundamental rights of young persons with disabilities. Inclusive digital skills initiatives can also contribute to addressing the shortage of digitally skilled workers in labour markets around the world.

2. Creating enabling, inclusive environments

Beyond current existing legislation, governments, international organizations and other policy-making bodies need to engage in designing, implementing, monitoring and financing digital skill acquisition policies that make it a priority to be fully inclusive of young persons with disabilities. COVID-19 recovery plans should make the acquisition of digital skills by young people with disabilities a priority. To effectively promote the inclusion of young persons with disabilities in mainstream digital skills development programmes, policy makers need to work towards creating enabling ecosystems where inclusive digital skills initiatives can thrive (ILO & Fundación ONCE, 2021). The following sections will deal with specific recommendations to create such environments.

2.1. Developing an enabling national policy or strategy

Where it is not already in place, a national policy or strategy on disability inclusive digital skills development should be drawn up, based on the principles of equal opportunity and non-discrimination, and equality between men and women. Governments and policy makers should focus on mainstream digital skills policies and strategies that seek to promote access to all, in a way that is inclusive of young people with disabilities, rather than on initiatives that focus solely on young persons with disabilities.

The policy or strategy should be developed by the relevant government ministry in consultation with key stakeholders, including other government ministries (including those responsible for education, employment, infrastructure and public transport), associations of employers, trade unions, and representative organisations of persons with disabilities. It should

acknowledge that disability is a cross-cutting theme, requiring collaborative action across different government portfolios to make disability inclusion a reality. It should provide a range of different training options, including centre-based training as well as online training.

Government programmes should be prescriptively targeted with sponsorship and funding to training programmes that develop the critical ICT skills will accelerate their incubation and impact.

Leveraging Artificial Intelligence to create inclusive opportunities

Artificial Intelligence (AI) can empower people with disabilities with tools that support independence and productivity, as technology rapidly changes the way we live, learn, and work.

AI for Accessibility is a Microsoft grant program that harnesses the power of AI to amplify human capability for people with disabilities. AI for Accessibility aims to do so through grants, investments of technology, and expertise.

Accenture's 2021 report "AI for disability inclusion: Enabling change with advanced technology" stresses the importance of designing and using AI in an inclusive and ethical way.

Initiatives like "Disability Ethical? AI" and the recent report by the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of persons with disabilities "Artificial Intelligence and disability: Balance of risks and opportunities" have echoed these messages.

2.1. Outreach

Equal opportunity for everyone to access vocational training and workplace learning is a key principle in digital skills initiatives. Affirmative action measures are needed for some groups in the population to encourage them to benefit from available opportunities. In the case of young people with disabilities, outreach and training allowances are the minimum requirement to

enable them to take up and complete training courses, along with an accessible training infrastructure. In the case of young women with disabilities, further measures may be required to enable them to take up and complete training courses, along with an accessible training infrastructure. In the case of young women with disabilities, further measures may be required to encourage them to attend training, particularly in contexts where their opportunities to train for employment are limited for social and cultural reasons.

Promoting digital skills for youth with disabilities in the Americas

The Trust for the Americas, at the Organization of American States (OAS) runs 149 Partnership in Opportunities for Employment through Technology in the Americas (POETA) Accessible digital centres throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. Through the digital inclusion project, the POETA Social Franchise supports a diverse group of young people, including those with disabilities. Bridging the economic and digital divide, POETA serves as a transformative catalyst for social and employment opportunities.

POETA facilitates digitally inclusive societies while promoting equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups throughout the Americas. At POETA, people with disabilities have the opportunity to engage with their communities, apply for jobs, and contribute to an inclusive programme while harnessing digital and life skills obtained in POETA centres. Within the centres, students with and without disabilities learn digital literacy skills such as web design, computer programming, and digital marketing.

Opening the digital door to young women with disabilities

Young women with disabilities tend to encounter additional barriers to access due to their age, gender and disability. Digitally skilled young women are more likely to get decent jobs where they are treated equally. Specific interventions can be put in place to help increase their successful participation in digital skills initiatives:

Individual level: interventions to build young women with disabilities interests and motivation to pursue digital skills and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers.

Family and peer level: interventions to engage parents and families to address misconceptions about sex-based, innate abilities, to expand understanding of STEM and digital skills educational opportunities and careers, and to connect families to educational advisers to build STEM pathways as well as peer support.

School level: interventions to address instructors' perceptions and capacity to develop and deliver gender-responsive curricula, to implement gender-neutral assignments.

Societal level: interventions to social and cultural norms related to gender equality, gender, and disability stereotypes in the media, policies and legislation.

Source: UNESCO, 2017.

3. Measures to ensure inclusiveness of digital skills initiatives

To ensure inclusiveness in digital skills initiatives it is essential that the proposed programmes are accessible and adapted to address the needs of all people equally. There may be physical barriers preventing persons with disabilities from getting to and entering the centre, moving around once inside and using training equipment. They may comprise procedural barriers embedded in rules and regulations. They may include communication and information barriers such as forms of training, training materials and approaches that are not accessible to people with different kinds of disabilities. They may be attitudinal barriers linked to negative attitudes

and stereotypes amongst staff and other students that often abound (ILO & Fundación ONCE, 2021).

3.1. Raise disability awareness

Awareness raising is an important step on the path to disability-inclusive digital skills initiatives, since negative attitudes, stereotypes and mistaken assumptions often form the most significant – and least apparent – barriers that people with disabilities face. Low expectations about their capacities contribute to the barriers they face in accessing mainstream skills development programmes. In many developing countries, for example, it is widely assumed that people with disabilities will earn a livelihood, if at all, in the informal economy or in unskilled roles. Consequently, skills development institutions oftentimes either do not admit trainees with disabilities at all or admit them only to courses involving low-level skills. Such low expectations and mistaken assumptions can also have a negative impact on the self-esteem and work aspirations of people with disabilities themselves. Awareness training should be provided for policymakers and managers, administrators, teachers, instructors and other staff of training centres. Measures should also be undertaken to raise the awareness among all trainees to what is involved in effective inclusion, so that misunderstandings about perceived special treatment and unfairness are avoided.

3.2. Accessibility of building and transport

To identify physical barriers that make it difficult for people with disabilities to take part in mainstream vocational training courses, an accessibility audit of the building/s and grounds needs to be undertaken, based on international standards. Where accommodation and transport are provided to trainees, these should also be audited. Action to remove the barriers may involve structural work or other adaptations requiring building renovation. Other steps may be simpler to take, for example by reorganizing layouts and furniture or by installing ramps. Some changes may involve significant costs while many can be introduced at minimal cost and could be undertaken internally, depending on what is involved.

3.3. Review of rules, materials, and methodologies

Entry criteria

The criteria for admitting training candidates should be reviewed to ensure that these do not inadvertently discriminate against candidates with disabilities, due to the educational requirements laid down or other requirements such as work experience. Exceptions to these requirements may be granted, such as in cases where a quota obligation has been introduced concerning the percentage of trainees with disabilities that skills development institutions are required to have. For example, the candidates' ability to meet the functional literacy and numeracy requirements of training programmes could be assessed, in place of educational level criteria. Where candidates are required to pass an entry test, the tests should be reviewed and if necessary adapted, to ensure that people with certain types of disability are not at a disadvantage and that their disability-related needs are met. For example, blind persons could be permitted to answer test questions orally, rather than in written form, if needed.

Training courses and materials

A review of the training courses and related materials from a disability perspective should be undertaken or commissioned. This will enable decision-makers to become aware of the curriculum changes required, and adaptations needed to training materials, tools and equipment to enable trainees with disabilities to use them.

Assessment

The methods of assessing and evaluating the performance of learners should be examined from a disability perspective and adapted to ensure that trainees with disabilities are not inadvertently prevented from demonstrating their capacity through the approaches used.

Providing reasonable accommodation

To enable them to participate in and complete programmes on an equal basis with others, people with disabilities may require reasonable accommodation. Depending on the disability-related need, this may take the form of technical aids, information in formats different from standard print (alternative formats), adaptations to training and assessment materials and equipment or flexibility in approaches used. Co-workers may also be able to support the skills development of people with disability, for example, companies could appoint a co-worker to be mentor and support people with intellectual disabilities at the initial stages of employment, until the employee assumes a full range of duties (ILO, 2016b). It is important to note that most reasonable accommodations do not involve a financial cost.

The requirement to provide reasonable accommodation is found in many non-discrimination laws, and the failure to provide this is considered a form of discrimination, as in the UN CRPD. Digital skills development programmes should make provision for reasonable accommodation in the implementation plans drawn up and allocate resources in their annual budgets to cover any costs involved. In identifying what reasonable

Online learning platforms on digital skills

Online learning platforms are making digital skills more accessible than ever before, with a wide variety of providers – private sector, non-profits, and academic institutions – providing either free or low-cost self-paced learning opportunities.

Since the emergence of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), as well as other learning platforms, a wide range of digital skills can be acquired through online learning. These learning opportunities run the gamut of digital skills, from foundational basic skills through to advanced professional skills in artificial intelligence and machine learning. Skills are typically certified either for free, or via a low-cost paid certification process.

What is reasonable accommodation?

Reasonable adjustments, often times also referred to as reasonable accommodations, are individualised adjustment to the environment in response to the specific requirements of a person, including for disability-specific needs.

Reasonable accommodations most often do not a financial cost and, in the context of skills development, aim to provide equal opportunities for students, including those with disability-specific needs, to enable them to effectively participate in training programmes.

By recognizing and accommodating individual needs, skills development providers create environments that truly welcome the diversity of their students. Reasonable accommodations are complementary to general, non-individualised accessibility which entails taking general measures in anticipation of the needs of a range of trainees or instructors with disabilities.

Source: ILO, 2016b.

accommodation is required, individuals with disabilities should be directly consulted, as they are often familiar with the adaptations and assistive devices that meet their needs.

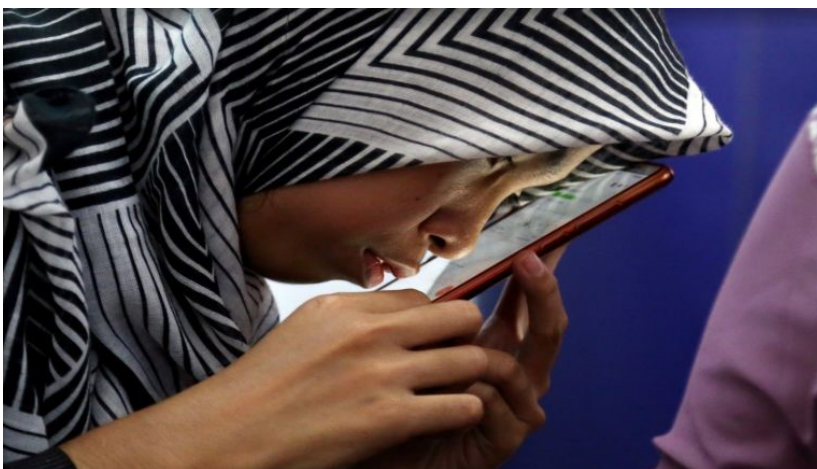
Monitoring and evaluation

Periodic monitoring and evaluation of policy impact will provide valuable information on whether the policy or strategies and the related implementation and action plans are resulting in increased admission of persons with disabilities into training programmes, satisfactory completion rates and good employment outcomes. Tracer studies will provide useful follow up information and general evaluation reports will highlight what is working well in the policy or strategy, and which elements need review. The national policy or strategy should provide for this process of regular review and assessment, and financial resources should be made available for this.

4. Recommendations to relevant stakeholders

Implementing inclusive digital skills initiatives requires local practical and institutional arrangements, as well as policy measures at the highest level. Young people with disabilities are more likely to benefit from an inclusive digital skills initiative when action is coordinated across all levels.

On a national level, governments and policy making bodies play an essential role in creating a supportive legislative and social policy framework that tackle the digital economy skills gap through proactive policy interventions that are barrier-free and are adapted to fulfil the needs of all people equally. Funding for programs that have measurable impact should be prioritized and supported. On an institutional level, digital skills training providers should ensure the development and maintenance of high-quality training services are provided in a supportive learning environment for a diverse group of trainees. On the business level, the private sector should work in tandem with government and service providers to identify and provide skills that are aligned with market needs. Finally, support institutions can promote training opportunities amongst its members.



4.1. Governments

Governments should ensure that disability issues are included in COVID-19 recovery plans and mainstreamed among all ministries and governmental institutions involved in the creation of skills strategies with the understanding that ensuring equal access to digital skills training will strengthen a country's ability to improve economic prosperity and social cohesion for all. Governments can also work on:

- **Coordinating:** among social partners, training providing institutions, employers, disabled persons organizations and other stakeholders. As well as promoting practical linkages among these institutions, governments can also promote a shared understanding of how to work on

disability issues, and monitor how successful they are, including through the use of disability-disaggregated data.

- **Enabling inclusive policy:** including disability issues in vocational education and training, ensuring that frameworks for quality digital skills training programmes have conditions for the inclusion of persons with disabilities, as mentioned in the previous section. Governments play a role to make it easier to replicate and fund targeted training programs. Government and disability advocacy groups can play an important and meaningful role to accelerate these programs, by providing a platform for training, education, job seekers with disability and employers to engage, which closes the critical skills gap needed in the open labour market.
- **Providing services and support:** in order to provide access for all, digital skills training institutions may need to make adaptations, including for the promotion of accessibility and provision of reasonable accommodation. Government agencies can provide guidelines, regulations, incentives, and technical support in this regard.

Spain's National Youth Guarantee Programme

The design plan of the initiative is particularly concerned with “ensuring that efforts to improve talents and skills include ICT or digital training and raise the category of vocational knowledge and skills, guaranteeing that study courses and ICT certifications are in line with comparable international standards”. In addition, it puts greater importance on the role of ICTs in improving access and integration into the job market of young people with disabilities or who have greater difficulties to access.

The commitment towards ICTs is reiterated by the national legislation. The Spanish Public Employment Service launched a call for proposals with a total budget of almost EUR 42 million for professional training activities and training in ICT and language courses to be developed at the national level for young people registered in the Youth Guarantee system.

Source: European Commission, 2015.

4.2. Digital skills training providers

Training providers should be incorporating young persons with disabilities throughout all training programmes in a way that integrated with other trainees. The process of developing an inclusive skills development system can be a lengthy one, as it involves reform through policies, budgets, infrastructures, a change in mindsets, as well as the training delivery itself. Alongside this process, there are practical measures to be taken in regard to mainstreaming, as follows:

- **Ensuring that educators are given training in mainstreaming and inclusion** – both from an awareness standpoint as well as with specific pedagogical strategies, tools, and resources to use to create an inclusive classroom.
- **Requiring that schools and universities employ materials and tools in the classroom to make accommodation for young people with disabilities**, e.g., by requiring inclusive procurement of ICT tools to ensure they are appropriate.
- **Increasing accessibility and providing reasonable accommodation:** adjusting online and offline training to make sure that young persons with disabilities can participate effectively.
- **Engaging employers:** training providers, especially those with pre-existing relationships with employers, can play an important role in encouraging and demonstrating employers to take on young trainees with disabilities.
- **Establishing partnerships:** together with disability organizations and other partners, training providers can acquire the expertise and resources needed to make these changes.

4.3. Private sector employers

The private sector and the business community have the opportunity to take the lead in the area of inclusion of young persons with disabilities in digital skills initiatives. Other stakeholders will need the assurance that employers are willing to engage young persons with disabilities in their workplaces once training has been completed. Additionally, the private sector can also play a key role in determining how well the proposed training matches with the needs and expectations of the labour markets. Finally, the private sector can also work on:

- **Targeting people with disabilities to fill critical talent gaps:** assessing their talent acquisition programs, metrics and processes to ensure they do not unintentionally exclude persons with disabilities as source of new talent. Several ICT companies have demonstrated success in disability hiring initiatives, such as Microsoft's Autism Hiring Program. This is increasingly important as AI becomes widely used as a recruitment tool. People with disabilities may be inadvertently excluded if employers do not ensure their AI engine is free of disability bias.
- **Assess and expand diversity hiring programmes:** ensuring diversity hiring programmes include people with disabilities.
- **Sharing experiences:** disseminating best practices and the possibilities relating to the hiring of young persons with disabilities; national business and disability networks can play a key role in this, including in developing countries.
- **Taking on young workers with disabilities:** adjusting online and offline training to make sure that young persons with disabilities can participate effectively.
- **Making workplaces disability-inclusive:** making a strong commitment to disability inclusion, by developing a disability management strategy, providing reasonable accommodations, and taking other measures to improve accessibility and inclusion in the workplace.
- **Creating products and services that are accessible by design.**

Cisco Networking Academy for diverse abilities

Cisco Networking Academy identifies and develops the skills people and businesses need to thrive in a digital economy. It works with educators, employers, and technology experts to create courses that prepare students for the future.

For the CISCO Networking Academy, accessibility means providing access to curricula for people with disabilities, either by design or through compatible use with assistive technology.

In Kenya, for example, CISCO Academy has offered Networking Academy courses to nearly 400 people with hearing impairments since 2012 through partnerships with Deaf Aid and Karen Technical Training Institute for the Deaf. Sixty-five percent of participants are employed or conducting internships, and the hiring managers often report that these workers are loyal, conscientious, and focused.

IBM's New Collar Initiative

IBM has also invested in the P-TECH education model, which connects high school, college and the business world to prepare students for technology jobs of the future, including cybersecurity.

Through P-TECH, public high school students can earn both a high school diploma and an industry-recognized two-year postsecondary degree at no cost to them or their families, while working with industry partners like IBM on skills mapping, mentorship, workplace experiences and internships. Although this program currently applies to all students, with and without disability, in 2019, IBM will deploy "New Collar" programs outside of the United States targeting youth with disabilities by working with local NGOs.

4.4. Support institutions

Support institutions, such as NGOs, disabled persons' organizations, and grassroots organizations, among others, can play a crucial role in providing coordination and assistance in the following way:

- **Providing access for young persons with disabilities:** connecting young people with disabilities with inclusive digital skills initiatives, as well as offering career guidance and job-coaching, as well as supporting their transition to the labour market.
- **Coordinating with enterprises:** identifying enterprises that are willing or have the potential to support digital skills training for young people with disabilities, as well as to provide advice on awareness raising, accessibility and reasonable accommodations.
- **Guiding education and digital skills training providers:** adapting curricula, training methods, and assessments, and providing advice on accessibility.
- **Conducting evaluations and studies:** supporting the collection of data as well as conducting evaluations and studies on different inclusive digital skills initiatives as a way to support evidence-based programmes that deal effectively with the digital skills gap.

abiLITy Cisco Academy

The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) in New York launched an innovative ICT training academy which seeks to bridge the ICT skills gap for people with disabilities by providing training in cyber security to enter the tech industry.

The MOPD abiLITy Academy was launched in partnership with Cisco, and funded by the UJA-Federation of New York and the J.E. & Z.B. Butler Foundation, with corporate sponsorship by BNP Paribas and Standard Chartered Bank.

The training academy recruited previously unemployed people with disabilities into a free of charge ICT training program, funded by a private-public partnership. Students learn cyber security skills and ready for work preparation in a 6-month classroom based programme. It is followed by a 3-month apprenticeship which leads directly to a network security analyst's paying at the market rate.

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